

The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Founded by EDWARD C. HEGELE

Volume XXXIX (No. 7)

JULY, 1925

(No. 830)

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JAPANESE BUDDHA

Frontispiece to The Open Court.

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JAPANESE BUDDHISM

BY W. G. BLAIKIE MURDOCH

MANY times the writer has put to Japanese friends the question: What is the state of Buddhism today, in the Land of Sunrise? Some have answered blandly, *mada onagi des*, still same is. Others have given a sharply different reply, *shindë imasu*, dying is. To declare of Buddhism in Nippon, that it holds now the position, which it had say four centuries ago, is only like making an analogous statement about Christianity in the Occident. Nevertheless, to maintain of the Light of Asia, that it no longer brings comfort to the toiling myriads in the Extreme Orient, is again utterly erroneous. And, granting that the fair faith of Sakyamuni is waning, it would be almost impossible to exaggerate the refining influence, which it exerted of old in Japan. How came she to know and love the Indian creed?

In the mid sixth century A.D., there ruled over the little realm, Kudara, in Korea, a monarch who was an ardent Buddhist, and they called his name Myong. It vexed him to think of the heathen condition, as he counted it, of his neighbors the Japanese; he was eager, that the people that sat in darkness should see great light. But being well aware, that proselytising is apt to give offence, Myong took a crafty step. He sent the reigning Japanese Emperor, Kimmei, a present of umbrellas, a Buddhist sculpture being included in the parcel. This was in the year 552, Osaka being then capital of Nippon. And Kimmei was deeply interested in the letter extolling Buddhism, which the good Myong had written, to enclose with his gifts. The Japanese potentate feared, however, that if he sanctioned the preaching of the alien cult, he would incense the deities of the pristine Japanese religion, Shinto. Wherefore, he summoned a council at Osaka.

The *Kojiki*, or Records of ancient Matters, by O no Yasumaro, was completed in 712. Commonly described as the oldest history of Japan, it would be more aptly defined as the Bible of Shinto. And it need hardly be doubted that this creed, as it was in the remote days of Kimmei, was little different from what it was, when Yasumaro wrote. For it is a religion, characteristic of a simple, primitive people, which is laid bare in his pages. The *Kojiki* relates that the Mikados are divine, being themselves descendants of the gods, and having been appointed by them to rule. Several of the Shinto deities are associated with forces in nature, for instance Amaterasu the sun-goddess. The faith embodies no moral code, calls neither for good deeds, nor for mental development. And since it teaches men to pray for aid, to their own dead ancestors, also to the illustrious departed in general, in pre-Buddhist eras great care was taken, to minister to the deceased. Weapons and utensils were put in the graves, and they were frequently encircled by sculptures, to act as guardians. But these sculptures were little more than gropings at representation of the human form, and even the best of the Shinto temples were mere cottages. In short, the art of the period, like its religion, tells of a nation still essentially primitive.

At the council summoned by Kimmei, the reception of Buddhism was hotly opposed by all the speakers, with the exception of one Soga. He pointed out, that already the Indian creed had been widely espoused in Korea and China. Was the Island Empire, Japan, to betray herself slow, he asked, in offering welcome to whatsoever things were the mark, of the latest continental civilization? Nevertheless, 20 years after the coming of the gifts from Kudara, there were still very few Buddhists in the Sunrise Land. And it was clear that, would the Light of Asia spread its beneficent rays there, the faith must have an enthusiastic apostle. It should be borne in mind that, long ere the days of Myong and Kimmei, the Brahmin pantheon had been adopted by the Buddhist church. This was the cause of that church becoming a great impulse, to the fashioning of pictures and sculptures. And no doubt the keen æsthetic tastes, with the Japanese Prince Shotoku, born in 572, were among the factors which led him to prefer the Indian religion to Shinto. Himself a musician and a sculptor, in boyhood he had as tutors, a Korean and a Chinese. Perhaps they descanted to their brilliant pupil, on art being far more advanced in Korea and China, than in Nippon. And when, in 593, the Prince commenced to rule as Regent, the nominal sovereign being the Empress Suiko, he straightway

began to hurl prodigious energies into the furtherance of Buddhism.

The young Regent ordained, that three of the Buddhist Scriptures should be expounded throughout Japan. He wrote essays on Buddhist philosophy, and he gave lectures on the same. But with his fine sharp mind he realized that, if the ennobling capacities of the faith which he loved were to prove efficacious, if they were to bring sweetness and light to his country, he must personally be a practical Buddhist. He must set an example, of the charity inculcated by Sakyamuni. Laboring to defend the common people against tyranny from the baronial class, seeking to heighten with the latter the sense of honor, and working to reform judicature, Shotoku wrote on this subject, a remarkable series of maxims. In connection with one of the Buddhist temples which he founded, he instituted an asylum for the poor, a hospital, and a dispensary. In the manipulation of foreign politics, he stood resolutely for pacific measures. Nevertheless, like all men of high talent, he had pride. He was the earliest Japanese ruler, who wrote to the court of China, in terms which implied that Japan was a power, no less important than her big neighbor. And on receiving the Regent's bold letter, the Chinese monarch was furious. Was he unaware, of the rapid changes which Buddhism was enacting in the Island Empire?

A long, and absorbing preoccupation with Shotoku, was supervising the construction of the Buddhist temple, Horiuji, close to Nara, which town is near Osaka. In his enthusiasm, the princely supervisor contrived, to bring Korean artificers to help him. And consequently, in general style Horiuji is similar to the Buddhist fanes, built contemporaneously with it in Korea and China. When Shotoku died in 621, primitive art was over in Nippon. Largely through the Prince's own beautiful work, as a carver of Buddhist images, there were now Japanese Buddhist sculptors, fashioning things of high beauty. In 701 there was promulgated a new code of laws, almost a replica of a code which had been lately drawn up in China. Hitherto, it had been the custom to change the seat of rule, on the accession of each Mikado, but in 710 Nara was chosen as a permanent metropolis. Already, Buddhism had been definitely professed by a big number of people of the upper classes, and soon the faith received ardent abetting from the Nara court.

It was the Mikado Shomu, crowned in 724, who vied with the late brilliant Regent in devotion to the Indian creed. Shomu's piety was shared amply by his wife, Komyo; like Shotoku before them, these monarchs sought to carry Buddhist teaching into practice

They engaged in philanthropic schemes, for example the founding of a second dispensary. And round about Nara, the royal pair built stately Buddhist temples, in the continental mode of architecture, which had been shown forth by Horiuji. Of these fanes was Todaiji, wherein was erected the largest metal sculpture in the Orient, a bronze of Dai-nichi Nyorai, supreme god in the Buddhist pantheon. If this particular image is a very poor one, its making was accompanied by that of a wealth of fine glyptic works. In the seven-hundreds, Japanese sculpture reached almost suddenly its highest glory: the golden age in the art continued, till early in the next cycle; and the masterpieces were all Buddhist images. From the eighth century likewise dates the oldest Japanese painting extant, a study of a Buddhist goddess. The same period witnessed the invention of the *katakana*, or Japanese syllabic script, people in Japan having heretofore written, solely with the Chinese ideographs. The same era looked on the inauguration of printing in Nippon, and it was a passage from the Buddhist Scriptures, which was printed on the million leaflets then disseminated. The *Kojiki*, it has been seen, was completed in 712; in 720 was finished the *Nihongi*, or Chronicle of Japan; and in or about 748 was begun the compiling of the first anthology of Japanese poems. At this date, versification contests were the favorite pastime in the royal palace. And the mere fact that ladies took part in these competitions, illustrates well how refined was the life of the imperial circle. In brief, the advent of Buddhism resulted, in the Japanese upper classes espousing before the eighth century was far advanced, the current civilization and culture of the Asiatic mainland. But was this step, along with the profession of Buddhism among those people, indeed attended by a complete change of belief on their part? And how did the Buddhist doctrines fare, among the masses?

When, just prior to the Empress Suiko's accession, the Mikado Sushun was assassinated, Prince Shotoku contended that the violent death was retribution, for sins which the murdered king had committed in a previous existence. To the great majority, however, high besides low, the Buddhist theory that sinners will return to the world, either as lower animals or as people, was hard to reconcile with the Shinto belief, that dead ancestors have power to help their descendants still living. Determined to overcome this obstacle, the Buddhist clergy in Japan, soon after Shotoku's day, preached that transmigration does not commence till a hundred years after death. This gave Japanese the opportunity of becoming Buddhists, while

not wholly forsaking Shinto. For the crafty declaration inferred, that people might pray to parents and grandparents, if not to remote forefathers, since it was possible that these were moving about on earth in reincarnated form. But although ministering to the dead, by surrounding the grave with sculptures, faded from custom, faith in the Shinto gods remained strong with a legion in all classes. And on the erection at Todaiji, of the colossal image of Dai-nichi Nyorai a Buddhist priest, Gyogi, delivered a sermon, designed to checkmate the Shintoists. His claim was that their sun-goddess, Amaterasu, was in actuality an avatar of the supreme Buddhist divinity, represented in the huge sculpture. In 794, the metropolis was removed from Nara to Kyoto. And soon afterwards the renowned Buddhist hierarch Kobo Daishi (774-835), preached that not Amaterasu only, but all Shinto deities, were avatars of personages in the Buddhist pantheon. The dual creed thus inaugurated, a belief simultaneously in the old religion and the new, became ere Kobo's death, almost universally the acknowledged cult. Here, then, in this absorption of the indigenous faith of Japan, lay the distinctive thing in Japanese Buddhism.

As the ninth century passed into the tenth, painting soared to splendor in Nippon. At this era the finest pictures, like the rare sculptures of earlier, were all or nearly all Buddhist works. But it is hard to say whether, on the spread of the Light of Asia, it really brought much material benefit to the masses. For written data about them, at the epoch of that event, are scarce in the extreme. In the *Nihongi*, however, it is at least told that, on Prince Shotoku's death, he was passionately mourned by the commonalty. And it is most unlikely they would have done this, unless some success had attended the Regent's lifelong efforts on their behalf. In the early days of Buddhism in Japan, people resisted stoutly the endeavor, to prevent them killing animals for food: naturally a heinous crime in the opinion of those orthodox Buddhists who, like Shotoku, believed in reincarnation. In fact, there never came a time, when more than a fraction of Japanese refrained from such shedding of blood. But the literature of Nippon, subsequent to the union of Buddhism with Shinto, embodies many things which show that, despite this addiction to slaughter, there had come to be widely alive the feeling that the reincarnation theory was true. Nevertheless, there was by no means renounced the idea that it was good to placate and adore progenitors. Nor did the union of the creeds destroy the Shinto tenet, that the Mikados were divine. In 1192

was founded the Shogunate, or military dictatorship; it speedily became the governing force, the crown devolving into a shadow of authority. And in 1348 the Shogunate was made an hereditary office with the Ashikaga family, who held it till 1573. But the Shoguns were always nominally subservient to the sacred Emperors.

If the assertion that the house divided against itself cannot stand, is one which may logically be supported, conversely it may well be urged that, when there goes forward the copious disparting of a religion, this tells of active thought with the religionists. And, in Nippon, with all her prolonging of Shinto beliefs, there was abundant dividing of Buddhism into *shu* or sects. It is usual to speak of the Light of Asia, as being of two main branches, Great Vehicle and Lesser Vehicle. There is sometimes classed as separate from those, the Middle Way, which, however, is a section of the Great Vehicle. It is the latter which teaches that a man must arrive at intellectual enlightenment while he is still in the corporeal state, would he pass onwards after death to Nirvana. The votaries of the Middle Way, while accepting this doctrine, add to it an intricate philosophy, whose chief point is, that on earth nothing exists, save in human imagination. And the Lesser Vehicle is the original, or primitive form of Buddhism, inculcating merely, that whoso leads an exemplary life, will not be called on to return to this vale of tears. On demise, he will be rewarded by annihilation.

It was the Great Vehicle which was known at first in Japan. But in 625 there went there a Korean priest, Ekwan, who expounded the Middle Way; and who likewise, presumably because he desired to win the masses, preached the simple gospel of the Lesser Vehicle. The outcome was the establishing of a Middle Way body, San Ron Shu, or the Sect of the Three Metaphysical Books; also of a Lesser Vehicle body, Jojitsu Ron Shu, or the Sect of the Perfection or Truth. These denominations were short-lived; by the time they passed away, other Buddhist churches had been begun; and there enrolled themselves in them the people, who had been members of the two above-named. In 654, a Japanese prelate, Dosho, instituted a Middle Way persuasion, the Hosso Shu, sometimes called the Yuishiki. Hosso Shu signifies, the Sect whose Members study the Nature of Things; Yuishiki means Idealism; and the church so entitled is extant even now. In 658 a Japanese hierarch, Chitsu, inaugurated a Lesser Vehicle sect, the Kushi or Treasure. But like its predecessor founded by Ekwan, it faded away soon, the members joining other Buddhist fraternities. Among the canonical

books of Buddhism, is the Scripture of the extensive Flower-adorning Gospel. And in 725 a Chinese priest, Dosen, started in Nippon a Great Vehicle sect, whose appellation, Keron, is a contracted equivalent of that, of the said Scripture. For it was on this work that Dosen based his sermons, and the Keron Shu has survived to the present day. In 754 a Chinese missionary, Kanshin, brought about the inception in Japan of a Lesser Vehicle sect, the Ritsu or Discipline, this also having survived till now. As early as the eighth century, there was talk about some of the Buddhist churchmen being corrupt, objections being raised, in particular against their being a great power in affairs of state. In 805 a Japanese priest, Dengyo, eager to bring reform, for he was a very earnest man, instituted the denomination of Tendai. And it was almost simultaneously that the Shingon church was founded by Kobo Daishi, who has been already spoken of. The name of Tendai is derived from that of a mountain in China, Tien Tai, and Shingon means New Word. Dengyo and Kobo were friends; the sects of their starting both belong to the Great Vehicle; and both are in existence yet.

The basic difference, between the Great Vehicle organizations, was from the outset comparatively small. The distinction of the Keron was only that it laid stress, on the excellence of certain cardinal virtues, upheld in the Scripture from which the sect took its name. The Shingon, dealing far more than the Keron and Tendai in elaborate and mysterious ritual, likewise acquired soon the reputation, of being lax in demand for morality, among its members. In centuries immediately following that, which saw the activities of Dengyo and Kobo, there grew steadily louder the outcry against the Buddhist clergy. Wealthy and luxurious, they had set up great monasteries, which were now in some cases bristling with weapons of war, the monks undergoing military drill. Out of the spirit of inquiry, which these abuses evoked, came four new churches. And as will transpire in studying them, the usual mode, of classifying Buddhist persuasions as either Great Vehicle or Lesser Vehicle, is scarcely adequate. For the new denominations were rather closer to Christianity than to Buddhism in general.

Of personages in the Buddhist pantheon in Amida, venerated by every sect. It is sometimes contended that Sakyamuni himself mentioned this deity with obeisance; for he is supposed to have been originally a king, who lived in India long ages before Sakyamuni. It is held that Amida renounced his throne so that he might become a Buddha; in other words, so that he might arrive at the

intellectual enlightenment necessary for the welfare of his soul. These contentions hint, that the central idea of the Great Vehicle had been familiar in India, prior to the advent of the alleged father of Buddhism. Be that as it may, it was in 1100 that Ryonin gave inception to the Yuzu Nembutsu church. It was in 1174 that Genku inaugurated the Jodo Shu; in 1224 Shinran Shonin the Jodo Shin Shu; and in 1275 Ippen the Ji Shu. All these priests were Japanese; the sects they founded are all extant still, and each has special association with Amida.

Yuzu means circulation, and Nembutsu is a contraction of *Namu Amida Butsu*, or Hail to the Buddha Amida. For Ryonin taught that people ought to view this deity, as Catholics in the Occident regard the Virgin, namely as an intercessor with the Almighty, on behalf of their souls. Jodo means Pure Land (i. e., Heaven), and Genku proclaimed that Amida's renunciation of his throne had been enacted, not for that personage's own good exclusively, but for the redemption of mankind. Wherefore, it is by faith in the remote sacrificial being, and not by righteous deeds, that salvation may be won, continued the Jodo founder. And he advocated interminable utterance of the adoring phrase, *Namu Amida Butsu*. Jodo Shin Shu means the True Sect of the Pure Land; this church likewise accepts the doctrine of redemption through Amida; and alone among Japanese Buddhist organizations, the Jodo Shin has a married clergy. Ji Shu means Time Sect, and apart from inculcating salvation through Amida, the peculiarity of the Ji is simply this. Ippen had travelled widely, preaching; and the church of his founding has a law, that its head hierarch should practise itineracy.

It was in 1191 that a Japanese priest, Eisai, began theological expositions, which led almost instantly to the starting of yet another Great Vehicle body, the Zen Shu or Contemplation Sect, flourishing still. In addition to upholding contemplation, the Zenists attached high value to spartanism, whence their church gained support especially from the soldier class. The Scripture of the Lotus of the good Law, is of the canonical books of Buddhism; Japanese equivalents of that name are *Myohorengēkyo* and *Hokkē*; and this Scripture was extolled as supreme by the Japanese priest, Nichiren (1222-1282). His followers thus came to be known as the *Hokkē Shu*, being also styled sometimes, the *Nichiren Shu*. But in claiming as he did that he was not the founder of a sect, Nichiren was right. For the *Hokkē* had long been a favorite book with the Tendai prelates; or to look further back, it was among those writings, on which

Prince Shotoku lectured. The Hokkē Shu may be described as a Great Vehicle body, of strong evangelical predilections, and it is thriving yet.

Fine Buddhist paintings continued to be wrought frequently, up till the thirteenth century. This witnessed the dawn of woodcut pictures, the art in which Nippon was to win ultimately her widest fame, and the first woodcuts were all studies of Buddhist deities. There was, too, in the thirteenth century, a revival of the glories of Buddhist sculpture, which renaissance endured, say a hundred years. Printing, from the remote day it began, by multiplying a text from the Scriptures of the Light of Asia, remained for some seven hundred years, almost wholly concerned with reduplicating Buddhist theological treatises, and books in the canon of the Indian faith. These books were in Chinese, nor was it till the twentieth century that the canon was translated into Japanese. Under the Ashikaga Shoguns, in power as has been noted from 1348 to 1573, the clergy of Sakyamuni's creed wore a triple laurel. Authors of most of the beautiful secular literature of the epoch, painters of most of its fine secular pictures, they were active in starting schools. Nevertheless, as in days soon after Kyoto had been chosen capital, so also now, the priests were very ready for fighting. If hardly anything owing to the ceaseless baronial strife, which the Shoguns were incapable of checking. And when the iron-handed soldier, Oda is known about the life of the masses before this particular period, it is only too well recorded that they suffered dire privation then. Nobunaga, tore down the Ashikaga Shogunate, he was determined that never again should the churches vie with the baronage, in being an armed peril to the Sunrise Land. If he quelled the turbulent nobles, it was the relentless blows he struck at the more menacing of the temples and monasteries, which ended wealth with the Buddhist hierarchy.

Iyeyasu, who established in 1603 the hereditary Shogunate of Tokugawa, was a member of the Jodo sect of Buddhism, and he was wont to take advice from priests on affairs of state. The second Tokugawa Shogun, Hidetada, ordained that every mature male in Japan must be on the membership roll of some Buddhist temple, likewise that every household in the land must possess a Buddhist image. The fifth Shogun of the line, Tsunayoshi, showed himself a very orthodox devotee of Buddhism, founding as he did an asylum, for aged and infirm dogs and horses. It was the extraordinary genius of Iyeyasu which, finally shattering the bellicosity of the

nobles, and creating at length a strong central government, brought for the populace tolerable comfort, with considerable education. It was just after Iyeyasu's time, that the toiling myriads came to reflect that refinement of theirs, which has passed well-nigh into a proverb. Sociologists and artists have marvelled that the world-famous color-prints should have been essentially a popular art, sold as they were for a few copper coins each. And, in those early seventeen hundreds, in which this woodcut art began quickly to reach loveliness, nearly all people in Nippon had houses, with something of architectural beauty. But remember, this culture with the masses was not exactly a new thing. It was the apogee of the civilization, introduced to the Island Empire ages before, by the coming of Buddhism.

As the nineteenth century neared meridian, and there grew active an anti-Shogunal party, they used as weapon the immemorial Shinto theory, about the Mikados being divine. When the Shogunate was subverted in 1868, the legislative force, set in its place, was the revived authority of the crown. And, in consonance, Shinto was proclaimed the official religion. But the union, between that creed and the Indian one, was too firmly planted in the heart of the majority, to be lightly removed. Thus, while it is true there are today, multitudes of Japanese who call themselves Shintoists and nothing else on the other hand all or seemingly all the avowed Buddhists are faithful, to the ancient Shinto belief, in the efficacy of prayer to their own ancestors. In their houses these Buddhists have a miniature shrine, for the purpose of ancestral worship.

With the proclamation that Shinto was the national faith, the government essayed to make all shrines of the reinstated cult, completely distinct. It endeavored to purge them of decorative items which, pertaining to Buddhist symbolism, told of the link between the indigenous and the foreign creed. In Nippon at present, there are about 70,000 temples of the Light of Asia, those of Shinto being nearly twice that number. It might be thought that exceptional popularity would lie, with the simple tenets of Buddhism of the Lesser Vehicle. But on the contrary, the solitary church of that class still extant, the Ritsu, is among the very smallest of current religious fraternities. The Zen and the Jodo Shin are the two largest persuasions, either of them being about the same size. The Shingon, with its fondness for ritual, comes third, being a good deal smaller, however, than Zen or Jodo Shin. The sole Middle Way sect still existing, the Hosso, is but a tiny affair, its fanes scarcely fifty, in

which paucity is ample significance. What shall it profit a man or woman in the hour of sorrow to hearken to the Middle Way philosophy, that nothing exists save in human imagination? It is normal that, in times of darkness, strong active people should find a little respite in the Zen advocacy of spartanism. It is normal that, in times of tribulation, people should discover consolation in the Jodo Shin doctrine, that their souls will be miraculously wafted to the Pure Land, through the sacrifice of Amida.

If these reflections are bound to rise, when studying the history of Japanese Buddhism, likewise they are bound to rise, when talking of religion to the humbler Japanese folk. "You may become a cat," was the saying to the writer, of a simple peasant woman, convinced of the truth of the reïncarnation theory. "Which deity do you principally long to see in the hereafter?" she continued, adding that her own preference was for Kwannon, the Buddhist goddess of compassion. Here was a person who did really think of the pantheon as composed of veritable beings on whom she might one day look. But of Japanese observations concerning the faith of Sakyamuni, they are the words of a city-bred woman, of the toiling multitude, which bring the sweetest perfume in the recollection: "Buddhist teaching makes the heart gentle."